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Coverage
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Theme
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Sudden infant deaths fall, stillbirths & deaths under one week rise

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The sudden infant death rate in England and Wales decreased by thirteen per cent between 2002 and 2003 from 0.32 per 1,000 live births to 0.28, according to new statistics published today* by the Office for National Statistics. Perinatal mortality rates (stillbirths and deaths under one week) increased to 8.5 per 1,000 live and stillbirths in 2003, from 8.0 in 2001 and 8.3 in 2002.

Health Statistics Quarterly 23 also contains new and up-to-date statistics on births, deaths and other health-related topics. In this issue there are new statistics on infant and perinatal mortality by health areas in England and Wales, sudden infant deaths in 2003, healthy life expectancy in Great Britain in 2001 and death registrations in England and Wales by area of residence in 2003.

There are feature articles on: the effect of the introduction of the tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases on cancer mortality trends in England and Wales; fatal toxicity of antidepressants in England and Wales, 1993 – 2002; trends in live births by mother's country of birth and other factors affecting low birthweight in England and Wales 1983 – 2001 and trends in live births and birthweight by social class, marital status and mother's age, 1976 – 2000.

Some new statistics in this issue:

Sudden infant deaths in England and Wales in 2003

- The sudden infant death rate was highest for babies of mothers aged under 20 at the time of the child's birth (0.52 per 1,000 live births). The rate fell with increasing age of mother.

Issued by
National Statistics
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone
Press Office 020 7533 5702
Email press.office@ons.gov.uk
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk

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- The sudden infant death rate for babies born outside marriage, where only the mother registered the birth (0.67 per 1,000 live births) was four times higher than the rate for babies born inside marriage (0.17 per 1,000 live births).
- The rate was three times higher for babies with fathers in routine and manual occupations (0.32 per 1,000 live births) compared to those in the managerial and professional occupations.
- The sudden infant death rate for babies weighing 1,500-1,999 grams (1.14 per 1,000 live births) was about ten times higher than that for babies weighing 3,500 grams and over (0.12 per 1,000 live births).

Infant and perinatal mortality 2003: health areas in England and Wales

Perinatal mortality (stillbirths and deaths under one week) increased for the second consecutive year. This was a result of increases in the stillbirth rate, from 5.3 per 1000 live and stillbirths in 2001 to 5.6 in 2002 and 5.7 in 2003, and an increase in the death rate in the first week of life, from 2.7 in 2001 and 2002 to 2.8 in 2003. This report gives summary statistics on live births, stillbirths and infant deaths registered in 2003 in England and Wales, by health area.

Some other findings include:

- Since 2001, there has been no change in the neonatal mortality rate (deaths under 28 days per 1,000 live births) of 3.6. The postneonatal mortality rate (deaths between 28 days and one year per 1,000 live births) was the same in 2003 as in 2002 at 1.7.
- Birmingham and the Black Country had the highest infant mortality rate among the Strategic Health Authorities in England at 8.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, while Dorset and Somerset had the lowest at 3.3 deaths per 1,000 live births, closely followed by Hampshire and the Isle of Wight at 3.4.
- The highest infant mortality rate amongst the Local Health Boards in Wales was in Torfaen at 7.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Some feature articles in this issue:**Fatal toxicity of antidepressants in England and Wales, 1993
- 2002**

Antidepressant drugs can be highly toxic in overdose and this article examines the trends in drug poisoning deaths involving antidepressants between 1993 and 2002 in England and Wales.

Some findings include:

- Between 1993 and 2002, there were 4,767 deaths in England and Wales involving antidepressant drugs. Just under 80 per cent of these were suicides.
- Death rates from antidepressant poisoning decreased from about nine to seven per million population for both sexes between 1993 and 2002. Unlike females, rates for males rose to a peak of 12 per million in 1997 before declining.
- Death rates per million prescription items were about 10 times higher for the group of drugs known as tricyclic antidepressants than for the newer selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs).
- For other antidepressants (particularly venlafaxine), death rates per million prescriptions increased between 1993 and 2002 and in 2002 the number of deaths involving these drugs exceeded that for SSRIs.
- Three quarters of deaths involving SSRIs also involved other drugs, compared to one quarter of deaths involving tricyclic antidepressants.

Trends in live births by mother's country of birth and other factors affecting low birthweight in England and Wales, 1983 – 2001.

The article investigates trends in low birthweight live births (those where a baby was not one of a multiple birth) by mother's country of birth using registration data in England and Wales. The analysis focuses on births to mothers born in the UK and countries that contribute to the main ethnic minority groups in England and Wales.

Some key findings include:

- The proportion of low birthweight babies (less than 2,500 grams) is highest among mothers born in East Africa, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- Low birthweight babies of mothers born in the UK, the Caribbean, West Africa, former Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are more likely to be born outside marriage than larger babies.
- Mothers born in the Caribbean and West Africa had a higher average age at birth than UK mothers.

Trends in live births and birthweight by social class, marital status and mother's age, 1976-2000

This article describes trends in live births by mother's age, social class of father and marital status, and also looks at births by birthweight and whether or not the baby was one of a multiple birth.

Some key findings include:

- The proportion of babies that were of low birthweight (when not one of a multiple birth) rose during the last quarter of the twentieth century, as a result of changes in the population structure and trends towards older ages at childbirth.
- Multiple births rose, as a proportion of all births, and this added to the overall rise in the incidence of low birthweight.

- The percentage of births outside marriage but registered jointly by both parents rose markedly and there was an increase in the proportion of fathers in non-manual occupations.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
2. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2004.